

The Drover's Dog

And Other Stories



Poems of Paul Hemphill

Volume Four

And Other Stories

*I love a sun-burned country, I like my toast well done.
I like girls with long, brown legs, and watch them as they run.*
Apologies to Dorothea McKellar.

There is a straight if idiosyncratic line between the balladeers of old and those of today. Between the old Greeks and the bush poets, and flowing between them all, the myriad tributaries and branches of the rivers of song and story. The "Child Ballads" in all their variations and permutations of *House Carpenter*, *Matty Groves*, *Barbara Allen*, *Geordie*, and the rest (there were three hundred and five of them, including thirty seven about Robin Hood!). The ubiquitous Anon with ballads like *Spencer The Rover* and the sanguinary *Long Lankin*. Many such songs transited the Atlantic in the hearts and haversacks of countless settlers and slaves, travelling the rivers of the Appalachians, up the Shenandoah, down the Tennessee, the Ohio, and the Mississippi, the subjects of so many songs in their own right, to re-emerge in the late 'forties in The Alan Lomax Collection, and the eccentric and idiosyncratic Harry Smith's encyclopedic "Anthology of American Folk Music"(just eighty four songs there), together, the source code of the folk canon and the well-spring of the folk and blues revival of the next two decades. No one song encapsulates all this better than the McGarrigle's *Going Back To Harlan*.

And from way back until today, there are the sundry 'epics in verse' that have graced many a poetry anthology. From the archaic and anarchic *Beowulf*, and *Le Chanson de Roland*, to Victorian favourites like Alfred Noye's' *The Highwayman*, for example, Matthew Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum*, and Rudyard Kipling's *The Ballad Of East And West*. And of course, that spooky, cookie product of substance abuse, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. And forget not the biggest and best ballads of them all, the blind bard John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*.

Those, then, were the roots. And here, now, are the fruits. The songs and stories presented in this collection and in others, whilst not claiming a place in the poets' pantheon, were most certainly inspired by them. An early example is *Lilith*, an abridged retelling of the fall of the Rebel Angels and of Adam and Eve. To quote from "Roman Holiday : The Poems of Meniscus Diabetes", "If Meniscus' tale of Adam, Eve, Lilith, and Lucifer had not been lost to history before its relatively recent discovery, one wonders if John Milton would have bothered to retell it in such lengthy and verbose detail". Indeed, many of the old stories retold in the Hebrew Heroes Song Cycle hark back to those tales so beloved of Sunday schools and 'sword and sandal' spectacles.

The latter, indeed, have a lot to answer for. *Moses Heston*, not included in this collection (see "Lost Boys - Forgotten Poems of Paul Hemphill"), was inspired by viewing, for the umpteenth time, old Cecil B's hyperventilated *The Ten Commandments*, juxtaposing this with a catalogue of Chuck's oeuvre. *Roman Holiday* irreverently references *Ben Hur*, *Spartacus*, *The Robe*, and *Barabbas*. Not to mention *I Claudius*, and *The Life Of Brian*. *Brave Goliath* channels Rocky Balboa whilst *Samson And Delightful* recalls Victor Mature. Kirk Douglas earns a second tribute in *Summer Is The Time (To Go A Viking)*. (Now, get this: the dubious, bad haired Canadian-Irish television series which premiered in March 2013 was based on this song, and not vice versa, and indeed follows the storyline almost to the letter!)

Titans Close and its prequel, overwrought sagas of battling bovines, owe their heritage to both Homer (the Greek, not the yellow one), and HW Longfellow's *Hiawatha* (specifically the epic struggle with the sturgeon). And there are echoes of the heroic verse that JRR Tolkien's heroes would recite at the drop of a broad-sword. But it also pays tribute to our own Banjo Paterson, particularly his faux-epic *The Geebung Polo Club*, and there is also the more contemporary, and incomparably incontinent *McArthur's Fart* by Rob Bath and Andrew Bleby, with its marvelous mix of pong, pun and pastiche. In this and other instances, I am reminded also of that excruciating English bard of bad puns, Les Barker, particularly his *Jason And The Arguments*. "No you're not, yes I am, no you're not..."

Most of all, it's about the primordial and perennial conflict between light and darkness, between good and evil. The law man and the colonel's son go up against the bandit and the gunslinger. Rudyard declaimed: "But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, when two strong men stand

face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth". And Hal David: "From the moment a girl gets to be full-grown, the very first thing she learns, when two men go out to face each other, only one retur-r-r-ns" (notwithstanding the fact that in the movie thus celebrated, nothing of the sort occurred).

The Ballad of The Drover's Dog is twin to Henry Lawson's *Harry Dale The Drover*, that wistful if overwrought tragedy of the homeward bound stockman who, along with his faithful hound, comes to grief in the flooded creek. Playing at a pub in Pontedawe, in South Wales, we sang the story of Bluey, the brave blue cattle dog. As ever, the audience took the song seriously albeit sardonically. But this time it was different - knowing smile flickered across many faces. Afterwards, folk came up to us and asked if we heard of Swansea Jack. Read the notes that accompany the song. Greater love hath no dog. Inspired by Henry, this story references council by-laws governing Sydney's famous Bondi Beach. The characters in the picture story painted by Gabrielle Tindall are represented by herself, her husband Warren, and their children, now grown, Dion and Samadhi.

Which reminds me of how I first met Warren, on Australia Day, thirty years ago. The rain was pouring down upon the main street of Coffs Harbour, capital of northern New South Wales's Costa Geriatrica. He was standing outside the RSL - leaning really, on his girlfriend's shoulder. Dressed in black from head to foot, and sporting a black akubra, with a black patch over his left eye. He was quite the bushranger. "You must come to Bellingen!" he says. "And where is Bellingen?" Says I. He points over his shoulder to the west - .over the hills and far away. Bye the bye, this story has grown a little in the telling, with a skerrick of embroidery around the basic facts (like the eye patch), but, as that journalist might have noted, isn't that is the way of all yarns?

As for the painting of *The Drover's Dog*, He is modelled on Warren's neurotic and elderly Blue heeler, Bozo (you couldn't sing a song about a mutt called Bozo - hence Bluey). It shows a typically bucolic vista of Bellingen Shire, with the heroes of another, contemporaneous song in that bears the dubious distinction of actually being "banned in Bellingen"). This latter saga, a rollicking cross between *The Man From Snowy River* and *Seven Brides For Seven Brothers*, is likewise loosely based on a true story, as is, believe it or not, the saga of the battling beef steaks. Titans Close is an actual lane in Boambee, near Coffs Harbour, the site of this equally actual and momentous duel.

Sadly, true too is the conversation recreated in *From Small Beginnings*. This occurred during a stay at the melanoma unit of Sydney's Royal Prince Albert Hospital. I was there with a broken leg, but the orthopaedic ward was full so I was parked there for a week, on morphine most of that time and in a space that could be described as 'out there'. Other poems from that sojourn are featured in the "Lost Boys" collection. True too the events described in *Come To The Garden*. I recall that day still, many years on: sitting atop a ridge overlooking the Manly Dam at the dawning of a beautiful summer's day. It is sung to the tune of the old English song *The Ash Grove*. The river of song and story again. And *Dolphin*? Generically so, inspired by a news report on dolphins held captive for the entertainment of tourists.

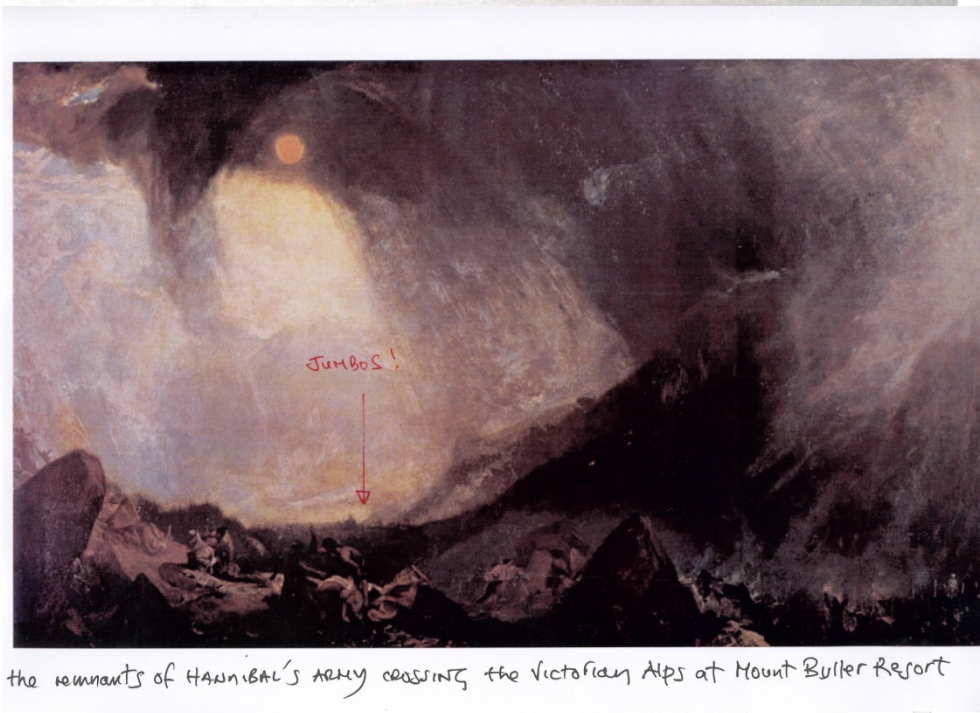
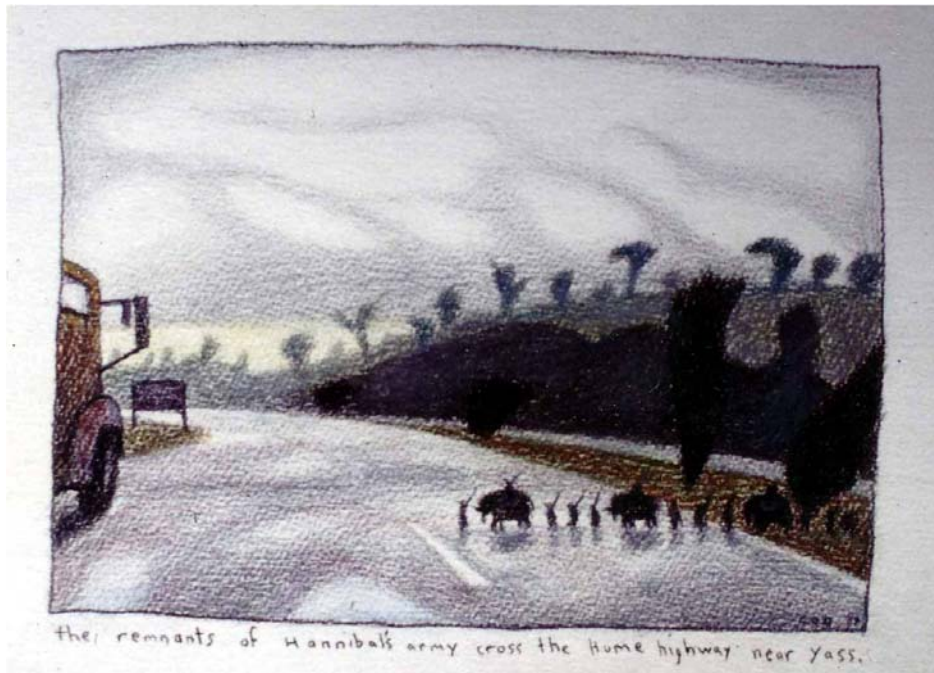
From *The Ballad of The Drovers Dog*, it is only a hop, step, and a boot scoot to that song that dares not mention its name, and to *Capricorn Cowboy*. We were doing a gig in cairns, in the tropical far north of Australia, against a backdrop of frogs and cicadas, street noise and broken and breaking glasses. One of the floor singers was Henry, a wannabe country & western singer. And country music of the cowboy variety is a thread that runs through most of these songs and stories. Three quarter time, regardless of the subject matter. *I Still Call Mongolia Home* is a cowboy song through and through, dedicated as it is to The Duke himself. And *Summer Is The Time*, whilst meandering all over the map, resolves into a finale that would not be out of place in *Oklahoma!* Well, sort of...And *Torquemada?* Well, it used to be called *Torquemada's Blues*, and didn't the blues originate in *The West!*

We draw long bows in this forward, and, indeed, take take long shots. Did I mention the thirty seven songs about Robin Hood amidst The Child Ballads? Perhaps this is the reason I have never written a song about the famous outlaw (although there are many mediocre movies out there to provide inspiration, and there is, indeed, a rough, hand-written draft somewhere in the loft). But a host of heroes

and villains, saints and sinners, gods and monsters, have been celebrated over the years. Angels and devils, soldiers and sailors, murders and marauders, pirates and priests. In this and in other collections, Vikings, Romans, Mongols, and the Spanish Inquisition have all faced the music in dubious anthems to power, pride, and prejudice.

In previewing verse presented in this collection, I have enjoyed the opportunity to rant and reminisce, and to wander off into seemingly irrelevant digressions. It is not often that ones gets the chance to ponder such diverse subjects as folk song collectors and second rate movies. But, as I saying before I wandered off down other avenues, there is a straight if idiosyncratic line between the balladeers of old and those of today. Between the old Greeks and the bush poets, blah blah blah...

Anyhow, reviewing the a-foregoing, and the vein in which it is presented, one thing is for certain: we all love a good story. As they say in Arabic, and as is said in all languages in all times and places, "ka-n ya ma ka-n bil 'adim izzama-n wa sa-lifi al aSri wa la-wa-n" or, "there was, oh yes, there was, in the oldest of days and ages and times". And the taller the story, the more unlikely the yarn, the better we appreciate it. During the closing scenes of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, the journalist says: "This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend". And this is really what this collection is about



Justaposed, world-renowned Australian artist and musician Reg Mombassa, and Joseph Mallard William Turner, an obscure early 19th Century English painter. The rain, the bleakness, the pitiful Carthaginian army, marching on and on. Reg has more elephants. What would Sister Wendy say? "How tremendously tiny they are - how gigantically small...The insignificance of Man in the face of the pitiless elephants - oops! - elements..." For me, it brings back memories of road trips of old. Seized engines, broken, windscreens (at Yass indeed), long hours on the two-lane highway, rain lashing down on The Deadly Hume, as through the swishing wipers we see...little people, little elephants...

Poems

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Pictures

1. Cover. *The Drover's Dog*, Gabrielle Tindal, 1986
2. Prize Brahmin and Gertrudis bulls Bjorn and Benny
3. The famous Wall Street Bull, and a photoshop parody
4. Happy Valley
5. Misty Valley
6. Dolphins, by photographer Dagorret Carlos.
7. HuldreFolk a 'Viking
8. Kirk Douglas in Viking array
9. Turkish soldiers at Gallipoli
10. *Drover's Dog*, illustrated by Gabrielle Tindal, 1986

Come to the Garden

You wake at day's dawning and the song of the morning,
The small birds are making their sweet melodies;
Through the window comes streaming the daylight's first gleaming,
And the wind from the ocean blows through the trees ...

*Oh, what a day it brings, oh, what a song it sings,
Oh, what a wondrous thing, music of Pan;
With warmth now, we greet you, longing to meet you,
Come to the garden, oh come, Son of Man.*

You wake at day's dawning to the sounds of the morning,
The small birds are making their greetings today;
The kookaburra bellows atop the green willow,
I dive 'neath my pillow, and yell: "Go away"!

Oh, what a day he brings, oh, what a song he sings ...

My lady is lying beside of me, sighing,
A picture of beauty, asleep there in bed;
I say: "G'day Darlin'", she turns to me snarlin':
"G'day yourself, Mister. I wish I was dead"!

Oh, what a day he brings, oh, what a song he sings...

You wake at day's dawning to the noise of the morning,
You wish you were elsewhere, you wish you were young;
And you wish you could throttle the pal with the bottle
Who said: "Now try this one, it's light on the tongue".

And oh, what a day he brings, oh, what song he sings...

And as you get older, the headaches get stronger,
They go on a lot longer than when you were young;
She's an awful hard mistress, this love for the liquor,
You promised and swore that one day, you might kick her,
And you rue the fell day that you pulled your first bung!

*And oh, what a song it sings, oh, what a day it brings,
Oh, what a wondrous thing, Music of Pan;
With warmth now, we greet you, longing to meet you,
Come to the garden, oh come, Son of Man,
Come to the garden, oh come, if you can!*

Titans Close (No Bull!)

*Arms and the man I sing... forc'd by fate,
And haughty Juno's unrelenting hate.*

Virgil, *The Aeneid*

The following events occurred on a summer's day a few years back, on the Pacific Highway, News South Wales' primary north-south arterial. At a place called Boambee, just south of the seaside town of Coffs Harbour (capital of the Retiree Riviera, the Costa Geriatrica), It was one of those 'believe it or not' occurrences that would see the raconteur ragged as having partaken of a wealth of wacky weed, of which there is an abundance thereabouts.



Benny was a champion
With many media mentions.
In pastures green, this bull had grown
To Hummer-like dimensions.
As gorgeous as a summer's day,
As white as Zeus in bull array
Who fair Europa bore away,
He nonchalantly munched his hay,
And mild were his intentions.
But so was paved the path to hell –
Adjacent to his premises,
There dwelt another mount of meat,
And he was Benny's nemesis.
As dark as night was Bjorn the Bad,
The son of Old Black Sambo,
With massive head,
And shoulders broad,
As lean and mean as Rambeau
(That's Sly, and not that fey French bard;
This bruiser was no bimbeau!)
His hide as dark as ebony,
As tough as old mahogany,
His horns shone like chalcedony,
This massif of solidity
Was built like a Pajero.
That morning bright, big Bjorn arose,
And bad and crazy brave,
The madness of the Minotaur,

A match for any Matador,
This buffalo Conquistador
Now aimed to misbehave!
He spied his rival from afar
And feral dreams compelled him.
Down through the creek
And up the bank,
A ton of meat propelled him.
Three fences strong he swept away,
Two wire and one electric.
Such barricades did not avail
Against a charge so hectic.
Mad Bjorn crashed through the final fence,
And Benny lunged in self-defence.
With bellows bright and bulk immense,
So they engaged, with rage intense,
With snorting breath and howls of death,
And dusty hooves of thunder,
A soaking gruel of snot and drool,
So to the death in mighty duel,
They locked and drew asunder.
This feral ruck of wayward cattle
Seemed so like some great Greek battle.
They butted heads, demolished sheds,
Made water tanks upend, 'tis said.
And on their contest so engaged,
Out onto the road they raged
Oblivious to traffic.
So motors swerved to left and right,
And cars careened in shock and fright,
Colliding to avoid the fight.
That raged about them graphic.
With smoking tyres and braying horns,
The screech of heavy braking,
As drove they through the ruck, it seemed
The very earth was shaking.
Loudly cried the panicked drivers,
Bayed the klaxons of prime movers
That swerved and swivelled wildly.
For on the highway dead ahead,
Bjorn and Benny's combat dread,
From such are rural legends made
(And that's to put it mildly!),
With bloodied brow and broken horn,
Benny locked on tight to Bjorn.
And white foam blood flecked
Was Bjorn's black neck,
And so he stood bejewelled with blood,
His hide a 'shine like varnished wood.
And Benny wild with pain and bile,
He pawed the ground and stood awhile,
His battered flanks incarnadine,
Just like some vampire movie scene.
Like torrents from a broken dam,
Beef met machine like battering ram.

As motors drove into the pair,
'twas like they hit a boulder.
And 'midst the smoke and engine roar
The upturned wheels a spinning there,
An Astra and a Subaru
Lay capsized on the shoulder.
And when the evening easterly
Dispersed the fog of war,
The mess of meat and metal
Lay like flotsam on the shore.
And through the mist of steam and dust,
Amidst the metal rubble,
Bjorn impaled upon the bull-bar
Of an overturned B Double.
Whilst the other gladiator
Gored a Holden radiator,
And with a last defiant roar.
Went off to his creator.
And so it passed at Titans Close
Such bruised and battered glory
Never had such mighty cattle,
Fallen In the midst of battle,
Caused the Gates of Hell to rattle.
(That beats the Old Greek's story!)
Then from the west, a might herd
Of Valkrie cattle came,
And in a crash of flashing hooves,
Bore Bjorn's black soul away.
And high upon the heaven's range,
Forever he will fly,
Running with the devil-herd
Across the endless sky.
So, Bjorn did join the ghost stampede.
That suited his psychosis.
But Benny's fate did consecrate
A pure apotheosis.
As choirs of heaven sang his praise,
Brave Ben, in angels' arms was raised,
And snowy white and heaven bright,
A constellation in the night,
He pranced and danced in a field of stars
To the strum of flamenco guitars.



Mads The Mad



Shoot straight you bastards!

The last words of Harry 'Breaker' Morant, February 1902

Some stories are so outlandish that their like is never seen again. But the bad day at Titans Close had an unusual prequel that was as unusual as it was epic. Not only was the protagonist of this tale related to one of the combatants, but, the target of tauran wrath was the owner of the other.

Prequel or sequel,
Black Bjorn knew no equal
His final fight with Benny
Was an epic of folklore.
Though I cannot match that saga
With its road kill rock 'n' roll,
There's another crazy story
From Boambee's fatal shore.
Now, compared with Bjorn and Benny,
It's poor thing, I confess,
But the story needed telling,
So I'll tell it nonetheless.
The events recalled preceded
Black Bjorn's dire demise.
And not a word is falsehood
For we do not deal in lies.
Nor strive we to embellish
The truth you now behold.
Suspend all disbelieving
As the tale of Mads is told.

Now Mads he was a rangy bull.
Not huge like his big brother.
But Mads was mad and Mads was bad.
This bull was born to bother.
His heart it was as black as tar,
His hide was like concrete,
And he made up with meanness
What he didn't do with meat.
His stamina was epic,
His stubbornness quite mythical,

His values quite unethical,
The toughest on the street.
He had no truck with paddock life,
His instincts super-feral.
No cattleman could fence him in
And did so at his peril.
No paddock could contain him,
Nor fence withstand his vigour.
And the chips on both his shoulders
Were big and getting bigger.
One day bad Mads was roving
As the farmer wandered by.
You could see he meant to do him
By the glint in his black eye.
The farmer backed up to the fence
With no place left to go,
And all he had for self-defense
Was a phone and triple o.
It must have been his lucky day -
A signal loud and clear
Went out across the ether, and,
It happened, help was near.
For right in his vicinity
A crowd opposing CSG
And the riot squad in SUV
Were proving their virility.
With armèd men on every hand,
His inner John McCane
Determined now make a stand,
And make a world of pain.
A mêlée quite spectacular,
His battle rage testicular,
Unstoppable, undroppable,
A feral gladiator,
Berserker blood a pumping,
And I tell you, it was something,
Onto the massed myrmidons
Like a vengeful terminator,
He came on like a 'dozer,
Cutting through them like a razor,
As batons flew, and gas cans too,
Some side arms and a tazer.
The roar of bull, the clash of arms,
The gasp of shock and awe,
And Mads had done what no bad bull
Had ever done before
He'd bested the states brightest,
Its scattered ranks laid low!
Oh, oxen! Sing the story,
From Cowes to Buffalo.
He reared and roared,
And bowed his head,
He challenged them to take him.
So they brought up their marksmen
As the only way to break him.

The snipers in their kevlar vests
Put well and truly to the test,
But it was Mads who came off best
With bullets stapled 'cross his chest.
He charged, they fired, and fired again.
Again, the slugs were flattened.
He snorted, farted, gave a shrug
As if it hardly mattered.
Another fusillade rang out,
And one shot hit his mug
Between his black and beady eyes.
And with a groan, his lights went out,
He tumbled slowly to the dirt.
And Mads the undefeated
Lay silent and inert.

There's blood upon the wattle
By the ring barked border tree.
There's a farmer in the valley
With bad PTSD.
Yes, a farmer in the valley
Who has given up on beef,
And has planted out his paddocks
Since his Benny came to grief.
His nerves fray if he hears Bizet
Or the honking of truck horns,
And he wears the cornedras de toros.
Like a psychic crown of thorns.
But there's a statue in a city
Almost half a world away,
Where the tale of Mads is mentioned
And remembered to this day,
As a symbol of aggression
And of optimistic hide,
A resister of oppression
And a prince of bullish pride.



Only black bulls go tot the bullring, only black bulls fight
Little White Bull (Bart, Prat & Bennett) form *Tommy The Toreador* (1959)

The Sons of The Father



The road runs through the valley for fifty miles or so,
But past a point 'bout halfway up, no stranger dates to go.
For there, Jack Elder rules his land just like a tribal chief,
And up amongst the tallowwood, Jack Elder keeps his fief.
The outside world ends at his gate, and gate is all there is
To mark what is his neighbours land and what he claims as his.
He lets his cattle pasture free, and if they chance to wander,
Jack's sons ride down like cavalry or hordes in search of plunder.

*They're the boys of Old Jack Elder and they're proudly primitive,
And hunting, shooting, fighting are the joys for which they live.
You venture her at your own risk, you'd best get into hiding
When the sons of the father come a riding.*

For these are old Jack's claim to fame, the lads who bear the family name,
And like the patriarchs of old, his progeny is great.
From three wives he has sought to breed a clan that's worthy of his seed;
A most prodigious feat indeed – the score is twenty eight.
They dwell in old Jacks castle, with grandsons too no doubt,
And if'n he gad draughts, oh well, they're not talked about.
They look a lot like daddy, and around the shire, it's said,
You can always tell an Elder by the fine shape of his head.

*And they're the boys of Old Jack Elder and they're proudly primitive,
And hunting, shooting, fighting are the joys for which they live.
You venture her at your own risk, you'd best get into hiding
When the sons of the father come a riding.*

I've seen them down the local pub, out for a drink with dad.
He stands above them like a king, the only law they've had.
He is the font of wisdom and the source of charity,
And they repay with love and fear and solidarity.
They each walk tall in the fatherglow and share reflected light,
And woe betide the townsmen who goad them to a fight,
For fifty six fists strike as one and likewise many feet,
Whilst father jack looks proudly on at his home-grown elite.

They're the boys of Old Jack Elder and they're proudly primitive,

*And hunting, shooting, fighting are the joys for which they live.
You venture her at your own risk, you'd best get into hiding
When the sons of the father come a riding.*

Provider and protect and the shelter from the storm
That has been held beyond the gate since Jack himself was born.
No taxman who policeman will dare cross his frontiers
For Jack has stood outside the law for near on eighty years.
The state would send in teachers to educate the lads.
Teach them how to read and write and other modern fads.
They found the task too daunting and they never stayed too long.
As they high-tailed down the valley, all the boys would sing this song..

*We're the boys of Old Jack Elder and we're proudly primitive,
And hunting, shooting, fighting are the joys for which we live.
You venture her at your own risk, you'd best get into hiding
When the sons of the father come a riding.*

But times they are a'changin' and old ties are breaking down.
I've heard it said that several lads have run off in to town.
And a couple of the grandsons have enrolled in local schools.
The sun is slowly setting on the empire that Jack rules.
Old Jack is setting on a bit; his life-time course is run.
The house that Jack built won't endure when he is dead and gone.
And the family tree will wither where once it stood so strong,
And no more will the valley ting to the Elder battle song...

*We're the boys of Old Jack Elder and we're proudly primitive,
And hunting, shooting, fighting are the joys for which we live.
You venture her at your own risk, you'd best get into hiding
When the sons of the father come a riding.*



Dolphin



*I wish you could swim like the dolphins
Like dolphins can swim
Though nothing will keep us together
We can beat them for ever and ever
Oh we can be Heroes just for one day
David Bowie, Heroes*

I dwell in the verge of the sea,
Vanished, alone and unfree –
I hear the sound of the waves;
And the song of my friends now and then,
From out where I was taken by men
To be one of the slaves.

Once day as we played in the foam,
We strayed from our safe ocean home –
And the hunters came;
How we danced in the warm sunlight,
Our bodies with water shone bright –
We were easy game.

And now in this prison I brood,
Perform for affection and food –
But I keep my control.
I jump high just to glimpse at the sea,
So near, yet so far now from me –
Loneliness eats the soul.

How much can a prisoner take?
One day, my strong heart will just break –
And I'll be set free.
My body I'll leave to the men,
And maybe they'll learn something then.
I'll swim out to sea.
My body I'll leave to the men,
And maybe they'll learn something when
I swim out to sea.

From Small Beginnings

Just before Christmas 1986, a horse I was riding slipped in the rain and fell on me. So I spend two weeks in hospital. Beds in orthopedic were like hen's teeth, so I ended up in the melanoma unit.

"Have you come down from the country?"
I took up the conversation
As we sat there watching telly
While she had her operation.
"Yes, we've come down for New England
And the city's strange to me,
But I get away sometimes
To look and see".

And I asked him "What's the trouble?"
And I knew the news was bad.
Though he seemed relaxed and friendly,
I could sense his soul was sad.
And I thought I'd change the subject,
Talk of Sydney Town instead.
But he had to talk to someone,
And this is what he said:

"Just a white-head melanoma
Right inside her little toe,
And they treated it for tinia
But the doctor didn't know.
Then he thought it was abscess,
But the experts put him right.
Couldn't help her, but
That chemo' treatment might".

"They took two of her toes off,
Thought they'd stop it at the start,
But the bugger jumped the scalpel,
Tried to take her leg apart.
Up the calf, right to the knee bone,
To the thigh bone and above.
And at last, it hit the liver.
Oh, we can't do nothing, love!"

Then the nurse came by to tell him
That they'd brought her back to bed.
No more words would pass between us.
There was no more to be said.
And I thought a while in silence,
Just my broken leg and I,
How some people go home mended,
And some just go home to die.

I Still Call Mongolia Home



General: Conan! What is best in life?

*Conan: To crush your enemies, see them driven before you,
and to hear the lamentation of their women*

Arnold Schwarzenegger as Conan the Barbarian, 1982

A song for migrants, travellers, Peter Allen, and John Wayne, star of the greatest Golden Turkey ever, *The Conqueror*. 'Awright, you Mongols!'

I

Alone atop his watchtower, his silent vigil keeps,
Enveloped in a web of dreams, the exiled soldier weeps:
"Oh do your harnessed hearts go out to men as sad as I,
A stranger, in a strange land, beneath a foreign sky".

And he in silent solitude can find neither peace nor rest,
As his thoughts reach out he dreams about his home far to the west:
"Though bound unto my watchtower, my heart can leap beyond,
To a land of fair enchantment with a sword in every pond".

Alone atop his watchtower, as the silent city sleeps,
Enveloped in a cloak of dreams, the exiled soldier weeps;
And he sings a song of travellers, who share his silent plight:
"The hopes and fears of all my years abide with me this night".

II

It's many long years since I set out from my hut upon the prairie,
To wander with the Golden Horde on exploits legendary.
Long have I raped and plundered, and rode with fire and sword,
But from my home across the Gobi, I never could cut the cord.

*And no matter where I wander,
No matter where I roam,
Though I rule the roost in a far-off land,
I still call Mongolia home.*

We started on a mission to make our people great,
To make this part of Asia one Mongol nation-state;
We'd heap heads into mountains, we'd wash the plains with blood;
We asked ourselves if Genghis Khan, we found that Genghis could.

*And no matter where we wander,
No matter where we roam,
Though we rule the roost in a far-off land,
We still call Mongolia home.*

We followed the Khan with the golden tongue and the sun, it burnt our backs;
The hot wind dulled our senses, and the thirst killed off our yaks;
We rode our ponies greedily, far across the endless steppes;
'Til the dreams of fame and fortune turned into the dreams of Schweppes!

*And no matter where we wander,
No matter where we roam,
Though we rule the roost in a far-off land,
We still call Mongolia home.*

Then, like the tide, we broke against the famous Chinese wall;
I found my stomach could not take to Chinese food, at all;
And though the taste of battle filled my senses constantly;
I yearned for yurt and yoghurt, across the wide Gobi.

*And no matter where we wander,
No matter where we roam,
Though we rule the roost in a far-off land,
We still call Mongolia home.*

Though I have been in China for many blood-soaked years,
The songs of old Mongolia still fill my eyes with tears;
And though I've raised a family, adopted Chinese ways;
There's ne'er a dry eye in the house when we sing of the Mongol days!

*And no matter where we wander,
No matter where we roam,
Though I rule the roost in a far-off land,
I rule the roost in a far-off land,
And I've put down roots in that far-off land,
I still call Mongolia home.*

Mongolia's Sons let us rejoice
For we are young and free!

Summer Is The Time To Go A Viking



A song about my ancestors. They were tall, blonde, and handsome. And that was just the women...

The pack ice is receding.
The birds are northward winging.
We know that winter's over,
And rejoice that spring is springing.
And we wake our sturdy longships
From their winter hibernation,
And whet our jaded appetites for sordid recreation.
As you wander in the valleys
In the early months of spring,
From sunrise until sunset,
You will hear the menfolk sing:

*Summertime is here again,
All you gallant northern men.
Time to play the game much too your liking.
For when birdsong fills the air,
And the land is green and fair,
Summer is the time to go a'viking.*

The winter months are long and dark;
Too cold to frolic in the park;
Or to go on jaunts across the cold North Sea, oh.
So it's time to put the feet up
Round the fire, and drink, and eat up,
And watch the re-runs on the old TV, oh.
And almost every evening,
You will hear the rafters ring
As every drunkard in the hall
Will lift his voice to sing:

*Summertime is here again,
All you gallant northern men.
Time to play the game much too your liking.
For when birdsong fills the air,
And the land is green and fair,
Summer is the time to go a'viking.*

When merrie buds of May
Begin to open sleepy eyes,
We Vikings get the wanderlust
And Lust in another disguise.

And we dream of rape and pillage,
And a church t desecrate
In some dreamy southern village -
What a joy to contemplate.
And a harbour lights do twinkle
And the ships at anchor swing,
If you go down to the seaside,
You will hear the sailors sing:

*Summertime is here again,
All you gallant northern men.
Time to play the game much too your liking.
For when birdsong fills the air,
And the land is green and fair,
Summer is the time to go a'viking.*

And it's a very special day
When the longships sail away,
And set forth on jolly summertime excursion.
And the Dragon prow is set
'gainst the sun and wind and wet,
And each sailor's mind's on
Summertime perversion.
Ad all on board day dreaming
Of the joys this trip shall bring.
As the North Wind fills the mainsail,
You will hear each Viking sing:

*Summertime is here again,
All you gallant northern men.
Time to play the game much too your liking.
For when birdsong fills the air,
And the land is green and fair,
Summer is the time to go a'viking.*

So all your city sailors
Who roam the harbour wide,
Remember that we Vikings,
We were not there for the ride.
And we don't need bumper stickers
Say we'd rather be sailing.
We were there for the blood
And the sickening thud,
And the song of axes flailing.
As the smoke from the burning townships swirl
And makes our eyes to sting!
Every bloodstained Viking hefty his axe
And fills his lungs to sing:

Oh, oh oh oh oh, oh oh oh oh, oh oh oh.
Oh, oh oh oh, oh oh oh, oh oh oh oh.

*Summertime is here again,
All you gallant northern men.
Time to play the game much too your liking.
For when birdsong fills the air,
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Summer is the time to go a'viking.*

Torquemada



In the parlance of *Ten Sixty Six and All That*, 1492 was “a good year”. With the surrender of Granada, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain completed the reconquista of Spain from the Moors. They expelled the Jewish people from their realm. And they subsidised the voyage of three tiny ships to the west – to Cathay, they thought. And they appointed Dominican prior Tomás de Torquemada as first Grand Inquisitor. He is particularly infamous for his persecution of ‘converted’ Jews and Muslims. He was one of the chief architects of the Alhambra Decree, which expelled the Jews from Spain in 1492. About 2,000 people were burned at the stake by the Spanish Inquisition between 1480 and 1530. Tomás was a good frightener. He liked to put a bit of stick about. His motto was ‘a little bit of pain doesn’t hurt’. It is said that one of the things that the Spanish Inquisition lacked was a good song, something that people could hum. This is it.

In King Fernando's day, the Church was in a state
Of siege from Red Revisionists, and down-right reprobates.
They looked around for volunteers who had no moral qualms,
So I rallied to the banner, answered the call to arms.

Well, I was no monastic freak, no man called me a fool.
I learned the skills of self-defence from the best karate school.
I trained for seven days a week in all the martial arts.
I knew all the pressure points and all the tender parts.

I put them all together in the service of Our Lord.
You can talk the leg off an iron pot but watch out for my sword.
The power of the pen works wonders, and the hide of the word is tough.
But give me the rack and sharp whip's crack and I'll show you my stuff!

You can talk about the Holocaust and Amin's well-stocked larder.
(That's Idi Amin, Big Daddy, down dere in Africa. He kept de heads of his enemies in de fridge,
and when he get lonely in de night, he wake him up to talk to dem. Spent his last days in Saudi Arabia,
clocking up huge phone bills and training to be a ten-pin bowling champion)
But they lacked the jazz and razzmatazz of Senor Torquemada.
They went into industry and prospered for a while,
But they went in for quantity but I went in for style!

Some folk go for fantasy, and others go for pop.
Some get off on nine-to-five and others like to bop.
Some go gathering nuts in May, take their shoes off to walk in the rain,
But give me the crack of the bones on the rack and the groans of a man in pain!

Some dine out on music, and others like to drink.
Some like to screw the whole day through and others like to think.
Some get their kicks from family and the joy of babes in crèche.
But give me the dread of the nearly dead and the smell of burning flesh.

So Mist'rs King and Spielberg, if you run out of ideas,
I've got a glossy catalogue of human faults and fears;
I've got a million ways and means to make fear work for you;
And if you can't find me in the phonebook, just contact Doctor Who!

Capricorn Cowboy

Henry was a country boy
From old Port Moresby town.
In Papua New Guinea,
He laid good country down.
Played his country love songs
And made himself a name,
And set out for Australia
And the country hall of fame.

*Capricorn Cowboy must walk tall
With his boots and hat and all;
He must never cry when things might get him down.
Capricorn Cowboy, big and strong,
Greet the hard world with a song;
Gonna make a name in country one fine day.*

Sailed into Cairns County,
Shiny boots and Stetson hat.
Tried to join the country club
But they turned him down flat.
Though he played them Buddy Williams
Like a true born country man,
They don't take to country music
With a well developed tan

*Capricorn Cowboy must walk tall
With his boots and hat and all;
He must never cry when things might get him down.
Capricorn Cowboy, big and strong,
Greet the hard world with a song;
Gonna make a name in country one fine day.*

But Henry is a fighter
In this world of men and mice.
He places good country music
In our far north paradise.
Plays in pubs and bars and clubs
That dig that country beat.
So give a big hand to the country man
In the dust and sweat and heat

*Capricorn Cowboy must walk tall
With his boots and hat and all;
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Capricorn Cowboy, big and strong,
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The Ballad of the Drover's Dog



On the slopes of Warrumbungle
Near Coonabarabran,
Where the cattle dog's the truest friend
Of the lonely cattleman,
Wherever dogs may gather
To do what dogs must do,
They never tire of listening to
The stirring tale of Blue.
One day, old Mick, the drover
Felt the bush had got him down.
He turned his battered Kingswood
To the lights of Sydney town.
He took with him old Bluey
As reward for a job well done;
The drover and the drover's dog
Drove east in search of fun.

Now Bluey'd been a drover's dog
Since he was but a pup,
And the biggest pond he had seen
Was the dam at Wagarrup;
But when he got to Bondi,
Quite unexpectedly,
This drover's dog went overboard
When first he saw the sea.

But all that shining water
And all that golden sand
Were straight away denied to him
For all dogs there were banned.
And the Beach Inspector chased him
To the streets of Waverley,
Where the Canine Control Units fought
To keep the town dog-free.

The reasons for his banishment
He could not understand.
The beaches were well-littered
With the junk of urban man.
And the surf was oft-times flavoured
With human calling cards.
It seemed to hypocritical
To hound poor dogs so hard!

Then he met a wise old-timer
Who said He'd show the way
To savour the delights of surf
While its keepers were away:
"They never go down early
And they never stay 'til dark,
And in wet and windy weather,
It's a doggie Luna Park".

The storm clouds came a 'rolling,
The wind howled for encores.
The waves dashed hard against the rocks
And surfies stayed indoors.
So Bluey went a 'rambling,
His spirit wild and free'
He saw a swimmer floundering
Out in the boiling sea.

He didn't stop to question.
Fear was unknown to Blue.
The instincts of a cattle dog
Told him what he should do.
He swam out 'til he reached the hand
That grasped at empty air.
He grabbed it, and struck back for land
To tow the swimmer there.

He dragged the drowning man to shore,
And as he gasped for breath,
The Bondi Beach Inspector
Came a 'running through the wet.
And with his strength depleted,
Bluey jumped into the waves,
But caught up in a rip-tide,
He went to a sailor's grave.

The Beach Inspector reached the man
Who Bluey'd brought to land,
For this had been the reason
That He'd run onto the sand.
He had not seen the cattle dog,
Nor seen his daring deed;
And when the swimmer told his tale,
His manly heart did bleed.

The story hit The Evening News
In letters big and bold.
In all the towns of New South Wales
The story was soon told
Of how the gallant cattle dog
Did brave the raging storm.
From Blue's supreme sacrifice,
A legend was soon born.

And out there in the dry lands
Near Coonabarabran,
Where the cattle dog's the truest friend
Of the lonely cattleman,
The hearts of beasts beat faster
And the eyes of dogs are dewey,
As mothers tell their pups the tale
Of Mick the Drover's Bluey.

The Story of Swansea Jack

Swansea Jack was a black retriever born in 1930. He lived in the North Dock- River Tawe district of Swansea with his master, William Thomas. Jack would always respond to cries for help from the water, diving into the water and pulling whoever was in difficulty to safety at the docks. He made his first rescue in June 1931, when he saved a 12 year old boy. This went unreported, but a few weeks later, this time in front of a crowd, Jack rescued a swimmer from the docks. His photograph appeared in the local paper and the local council awarded him a silver collar. In 1936, he was awarded the prestigious 'Bravest Dog of the Year' award by the 'Star' newspaper. He received a silver cup from the Lord Mayor of London, and he is still the only dog to have been awarded two bronze medals ('the canine V.C.') by the National Canine Defence League. Legend has it that in his lifetime, he saved 27 people from the Docks and River Tawe. Sadly, in October 1937, Swansea Jack died after eating rat poison. His burial monument, paid for by public subscription, is located on the Promenade in Swansea near St.Helen's Rugby Ground. In 2000, Swansea Jack was named 'Dog of the Century' by NewFound Friends of Bristol who train domestic dogs in aquatic rescue techniques.

Up there with in the canine roll of honour with Greyfriars Bobby, the faithful Edinburgh pooch, and Laika the doomed Soviet astrodog, and the dog who sat on the tucker box nine miles form Gundegai. The latter was memorialized by a famous statue beside the deadly Hume, and long since stranded by a bypass. As I write, in 2011, the top Australian Movie awards went to Red Dog, a lightweight, feel good film about a red kelpie who won the hearts of an outback mining town.



The Ballad of the Drover's Dog

As told by to Paul Hemphill in Bondi in 1984, and illustrated by Gabrielle Tindall of Boggy Boggy Creek, near Bellingen in 1986



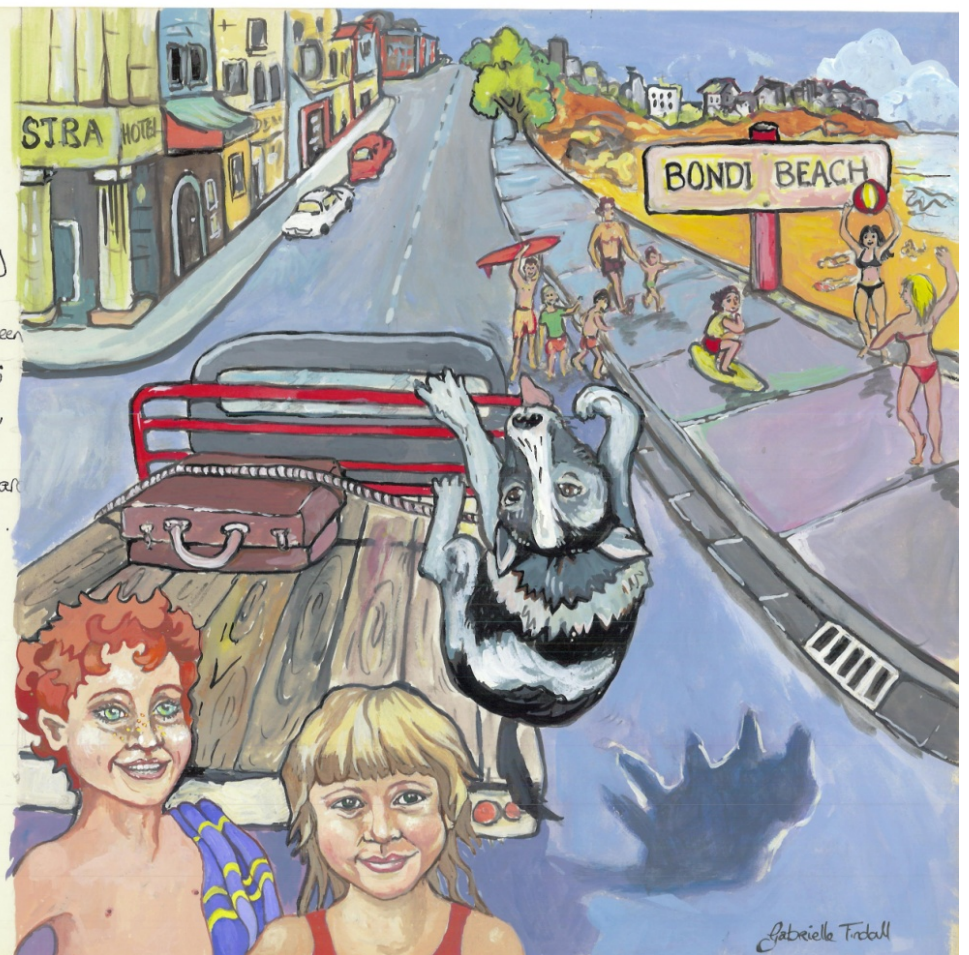
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 of the lonely cattleman,
 The hearts of beasts beat faster
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 As mothers tell their pups the
 Of Mick the Drover's Blue





About The Writer

Multi-award winning songwriter Paul Hemphill has performed throughout Australasia and the UK, as a solo artist and as a member of the shadowy HuldreFolk, combining poetry and music, horror and humour. Vikings, Romans, Mongols, and the Spanish Inquisition have all faced the music!

Something old, something new, something that may take us disappearing down the foggy ruins of time – pushing poetic licence to its hazy limits, reacquainting us with his particular take on history, imparting an altogether different perspective on pain and pandemonium, and sharing with us dubious anthems to power, pride, and prejudice.

You can find out more and listen to some of Paul's songs on SoundCloud and YouTube. Search under Paul Hemphill or HuldreFolk (but ignore the Dutch death metal band of the same name)

